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SERGEI PROZOROV

THEORY OF THE POLITICAL SUBJECT: VOID UNIVERSALISM II

Chapter 1: The Inexistent: Objects and Subjects of World Politics

The Inexistent Object

World politics is a practice of the affirmation of the three axioms of the World, freedom, equality and community, in an infinity of positive worlds. Since it does not negate any of the axioms, it is singular among all possible modes of politics in resisting subsumption under the transcendental order of a particular world, i.e. it alone fulfills the promise of universality that is inherent in all politics. While the forms of politics that combine the affirmation of some axioms with the negation of others (e.g. libertarianism, communitarianism, egalitarianism or their partial combinations) necessarily compromise the universality of politics, thereby also weakening the degree of the affirmation of the axiom that they actually uphold, world politics affirms all three axioms to the maximal degree. Its effects must therefore exceed a mere modification of the particular order of the world, e.g. the shift from a libertarian to a communitarian hegemony or a relative downgrading of equality or freedom as the primary governmental rationality of the world in question. If the effects

of particularistic forms of politics may be analyzed in terms of positive modifications, redistributions and shifts in the transcendental order that leave the basic principle of the ordering of the world intact, world politics affects and transforms this very principle, putting in question the positivity of the entire world – hence its name.

Yet, what does this mean from an intra-worldly perspective? How does the ontological universality of world politics, its maximal forcing of the void of the World into the world, manifest itself in the world in question? What is it that world politics *does* in the world that differentiates it from the more familiar particularistic modes of politics or from the wholly non-political activity of worldly management? In order to answer this question we must move from the ontological terrain of *Ontology and World Politics*, in which politics was conceived, as it were, from the standpoint of the World rather than positive worlds, towards the terrain that Badiou terms phenomenological, i.e. the domain of intra-worldly appearance, positively regulated by the transcendental of the world (Badiou, 2009b: 38-39, 118-119). More specifically, we are interested precisely in the articulation of the ontological and phenomenological levels of inquiry, which will permit us to trace the production of ontic, intra-worldly effects of the ontological axioms of the World.

The three axioms assert that all beings in all worlds are free, equal and in common *in their being-in-the-World*, a mode of appearance of beings in their being, subtracted from all intra-worldly determinations. The affirmation of these axioms in positive worlds, where beings appear in positive identities regulated by the transcendental, evidently manifests the

difference between our *ontological* being-in-the-World, characterized by absolute freedom, equality and community, and our *ontic* being-in-the-world, in which these very axioms are at best relativized as instruments of the transcendental order and at worst simply negated. This is a form of what Martin Heidegger famously termed the ontological difference, i.e. the difference between Being and beings, or, in Badiou's terms, between being and appearance. That which ontologically *is* (the community of free and equal beings) does not *appear* in our worlds, in the sense that its degree of existence there is minimal, i.e. nil. In *Logics of Worlds* Badiou terms the element that *is* but does not *appear* in the world its *inexistent* (Badiou, 2009b: 321-324).¹ '[The inexistent] is in the world a being whose being is attested but whose existence is not. Or a being who happens 'there' as nothingness.' (Ibid.: 343) In Badiou's argument, the inexistent testifies to the contingency of the world as a structure of appearing: if there is, in an object that appears in the world, an element that does not appear, or appears as 'nothing', then the entire object might not have appeared: 'there is a reserve of being which, subtracted from appearance, traces within this appearance the fact that it is always contingent for such a being to appear there.' (Ibid.: 322)

It is precisely this inexistent element that is the *object* of world politics: what world politics *does* in the world is raise the inexistent object to maximal intra-worldly existence, which thus becomes a positive intra-worldly effect of the axioms derived from the void of the World. While particularistic forms of politics are only capable of making some worldly beings exist *more or less* (i.e. shifting from a non-minimal degree to the maximum), world politics grants maximal worldly existence to what is entirely lacking this existence to begin with. World politics affirms that whatever is denied existence in the world nonetheless possesses

being and ventures to grant this being maximal appearance in the world in question. The political imperative thus consists in *leveling* the ontological difference: what *is* must also be brought to *appearance* in the world and, moreover, it must appear maximally. In accordance with the famous line from the *Internationale*, what was nothing (in the world) will become everything (Badiou, 2005b: 115; 2011c: 61).

We may approach the inexistent object as the ontic correlate of the World: after all, what *is* in every world as a universal part, yet is proscribed from appearance by the world's transcendental is the void of the World as such: *what is nothing in the world is, first of all, the Nothing itself*. This is why in his *Ethics*, written prior to the detailed elaboration of the notion of the inexistent, Badiou refers to this object as the 'situated void' of the situation, which is only brought to appearance as a consequence of the event:

At the heart of every situation, as the foundation of its being, there is a 'situated' void, around which is organized the plenitude (of the stable multiples) of the situation in question. Thus, at the heart of the baroque style as its virtuoso saturation lay the absence of a genuine conception of musical architectonics. [Similarly], the proletariat - being entirely dispossessed and absent from the political stage - is that around which is organized the complacent plenitude established by the rule of those who possess capital. The fundamental ontological characteristic of an event is to inscribe, to name, the situated void of that for which it is an event. (Badiou, 2001a: 68-69)

It is evident that this situated void is produced by the intra-worldly negation of the axioms of the World, which, as we have argued in *Ontology and World Politics* (Prozorov, 2013, chapter 4), is constitutive of the world's very positivity. Since it does not exist in the world, this object is logically excluded from being in common with those worldly beings, whose degree of existence is non-minimal. Since its degree of appearance is by definition less than that of *any* other being (i.e. it is *equal to nothing*), it is unequal to every being of the world. Finally, since an inexistent element does not appear in the world, the question of its freedom there cannot even arise: it is not even *there*, where it could be free or otherwise. Since existence in the world is a status assigned by the transcendental indexing of an element (Badiou, 2009b: 246-247), something can only inexist as a result of a transcendental negation that excludes a being from appearance while maintaining it in its being.

The relationship between the inexistent object and the transcendental order thus parallels the relationship between the sovereign, defined in the Schmittian terms of the subject of the decision on the exception, and Giorgio Agamben's famous figure of the *homo sacer*, the being that is exposed to arbitrary sovereign violence. Indeed, the sovereign and the inexistent appear almost symmetrical: both are ontologically *in* the world yet phenomenally *outside* it, the former in the mode of majestic pseudo-transcendence and the latter in the form of abject, zero-degree immanence: 'the sovereign is the one with respect to whom all men are potentially *homines sacri*, and *homo sacer* is the one with respect to whom all men act as sovereigns.' (Agamben, 1998: 83) In more general terms, we may define the sovereign

as the one who can make any being of the world inexistent, while the inexistent is the object of anyone's sovereignty, i.e. that in relation to which even the lowliest figure of the world perceives itself as all-powerful.

And yet, if inexistence is never inherent in a being, but is rather a result of its indexing by the transcendental, then this status is always contingent, just as every transcendental order and every sovereign decision, which have no ontological correlates. This means that the inexistent can be *brought to existence* by the transformation of the transcendental, which is precisely the task of world politics. The ascent of the inexistent to existence in the world is only possible through a radical relativization of the transcendental that authorized this inexistence in the first place. By affirming the three axioms to the maximal degree world-political practice convokes, within the positivity of the ordered world, the void of the World, illuminates the contingency and inconsistency of the existing order and disqualifies the transcendental negation of the inexistent element. As a result of political practice, the aspects of the transcendental that conflict with the three axioms, e.g. exclusionary legislation, norms prescribing servitude or hierarchies of access and influence, are themselves to be relegated to inexistence.

The idea of the inexistent permits us to appreciate the difference of world politics from the other six political invariants. Insofar as at least one axiom is *affirmed* in it, a practice is political and thus takes an inexistent of the world as an object, i.e. it ventures to overcome the deprivation of some beings of the world of freedom, equality or community. Yet, insofar

as at least one axiom is *negated*, this negation itself produces an inexistent object in the world, be it an individual or group that is denied freedom, treated unequally or excluded from the community. Moreover, as long as not all three axioms are affirmed at once, the intensity of the affirmed axiom is less than maximal, hence the inexistent object does not rise to maximal existence in the world and its degree of existence either remains minimal, in which case, nothing happens but a mere ‘fact’ of affirmation (see Badiou, 2009b: 374), or is elevated to a non-maximal status, in which case the political practice remains what Badiou calls a ‘weak singularity’ (ibid.).² Thus, only world politics is capable of fulfilling the imperative of granting maximal existence to the inexistent and thus genuinely changing the world, in which it is exercised.

Given this singular capacity, world politics might appear to follow a strictly uniform logic, in which all three axioms are affirmed with equal intensity irrespective of the positive features of the world, in which they are affirmed. Of course, insofar as world politics takes as its object the inexistent of a positive world, it must always begin by engaging with the concrete actuality of this world and determining *what* its inexistent is. Nonetheless, the answer to this ‘what’ question cannot possibly consist in the positive predicates of the inexistent object: insofar as this object does not *appear* in the world, it *has* no such predicates, hence all we have to go on is the sheer facticity of its being. Since all inexistent beings appear in the world to a minimal degree that is non-decomposable, ‘transcendentally without parts’ (ibid.: 323), they are strictly speaking the *same* from the perspective of the world.

As we shall argue in more detail throughout this book, the logic of world politics is entirely different from the valorization of subjugated or marginalized identities. What world politics seeks to overcome is not the inexistence of this or that particular object, on the grounds that it deserves a greater degree of existence due to its particularity, but rather the transcendental *function* of assigning inexistence as such, irrespectively of what particular objects are subjected to it. Thus, when we pose the question of what the inexistence of the world is, we do not inquire about the attributes of particular beings who happen to inexist in this world but rather about what axioms this world negates, thereby relegating a multiplicity of beings to inexistence: is the inexistent object of the world constituted by the deprivation of freedom, the denial of equality, the exclusion from community or any combination thereof? Prior to the political maximization of its existence, all we can know about the inexistence of the world is its status of being unfree, unequal and excluded from community.

By our definition, world politics must maximally affirm *all three* axioms at the same time. Nonetheless, insofar as political practice unfolds not in a totally apolitical world but in a world constituted by prior political sequences, the effect of world-political affirmation will evidently vary, depending on whether it affirms what is *already* affirmed in the world (e.g. community), however partially, what is denied in a reactive manner (e.g. freedom) or what is violently destroyed (e.g. equality).³ In this example, the affirmation of equality passes from absolute inexistence in the world to maximal presence, while the affirmation of community travels a shorter distance from a non-maximal affirmation, whose degree is only weakened because the other axioms are negated, to maximal presence. We shall term the

axiom, whose degree of affirmation moves from minimal to maximal existence in the world the *principal* of world politics in the sense that its affirmation entails the greatest degree of transformation. The principal of world politics is the axiom, whose minimal degree of appearance in the world accounts for the non-maximal appearance of the other axioms and which is therefore the key to any transformation whatsoever. As long as this principal remains negated, it is impossible to raise the degree of affirmation of the other axioms: libertarian interventions maximizing e.g. the freedom of expression are of limited use in a society founded on slavery, just as egalitarian initiatives only go so far in a concentration camp.

We may thus envision various *types* of world politics defined by their principal that correspond to the six particularistic versions of politics outlined above but, in contrast to those invariants, do not compromise their universality, since they do not negate a single axiom. Whenever we speak of a libertarian, egalitarian or communitarian world politics, we merely mark that which exists *least* in the world in question and thus calls for the greatest degree of transformation. Thus, the world-political operation on the inexistent object does not follow a uniform logic irrespective of the particular features of the world but rather takes as its principal that which the world negates to the greatest degree. In this manner it seeks to effect the intra-worldly change from the minimum to the maximum that Badiou aptly terms 'the existential absolutization of the inexistent' (Badiou, 2009b: 394).

Inexistence and the Absolute

Yet, what is the meaning of the *absolute* in the context of world politics? Contemporary political thought, both in its liberal and its critical forms, is generally hostile to the very idea of the absolute in politics as, at best, transforming politics into a site of antagonism between rigid dogmatic positions, each claiming access to the absolute, and, at worst, dispensing with politics altogether in a totalitarian order that pretends to embody the said absolute and hence no longer needs political praxis. Instead of continuing to talk about absolutes, we are offered more modest visions of politics as regulated competition for scant resources, permanent discussion in the quest for rational consensus, agonistic confrontation between mutually recognized adversaries, the struggle for recognition of particular identities, etc. All these forms of politics are marked by the explicit renunciation of any absolute ends in politics, becoming content with 'relative gains' in the process that is oriented simply towards its own perpetuation. If anything is absolutized in these approaches, it is the political *procedure* itself, be it formal democracy in liberal theory or the process of deliberation or agonistic contestation in critical discourses. Nonetheless, the obverse of this reduction of politics to a procedure is the increasing perception of the vacuity of its content, lamented by both the conservative critics of the excesses of democracy and the partisans of greater and more substantial democratization (cf. Henri-Levy, 2009; Rancière, 2007, 2011; Badiou, 2011b: 6-15; Žižek, 2001: 100-119). If politics becomes the infinite process of competitive or agonistic negotiation between existing identities in particularistic worlds that are becoming ever more complex, it loses its transformative capacity, becoming wholly subsumed under the transcendental of the world as little more than an accompaniment to intra-worldly rationalities of governance.

In contrast, our understanding of politics as a procedure that brings the World into worlds by producing positive effects of the three universal axioms places politics at a distance from the transcendental order as always potentially disruptive of it. While intra-worldly rationalities of governance tend to emphasize the extreme complexity of the world, which allegedly disqualifies 'absolute positions', 'easy answers', 'quick solutions', 'utopian visions', etc, in our argument politics is rather characterized by a radical *simplicity*. While, as we shall argue in the following chapters, it is sometimes very difficult to decide *whether* to act politically in a concrete situation, the *content* of political praxis is quite simple and consists in the evaluation and transformation of the world in terms of freedom, equality and community. This inherent orientation of politics towards *simplification* of worlds is demonstrated with admirable clarity in Badiou's notion of the 'treatment of points', which consists in the superimposition onto the infinite complexity of the world of the simplest possible binary transcendental $T(0, 1)$, evaluating the world in terms of a simple 'yes or no'. 'The notion of point filters the nuances of the transcendental (the possible infinity of degrees) through the decisional and declaratory brutality of the 'either this or that' represented by the simple pair of the zero and the one.' (Badiou, 2009b: 591) This filtering disrupts the existing order, introducing a binary either-or situation in place of its infinite complexity: 'The point enacts a kind of abstract regrouping of the multiplicities that appear in the world. Their complex composition is subsumed under a binary simplification, which is also something like an existential densification.' (Ibid.: 404) This existential densification is a result of the reduction of the infinity of degrees of appearance *from* the minimum *to* the maximum *to* the stark binary choice between the extremes: the minimum *or* the maximum.

In terms of our idea of political affirmation, the treatment of the point in terms of the three axioms reduces the complexity of the intra-worldly order to the binary evaluation: does this aspect of the transcendental affirm or negate freedom, equality and community? Political praxis evaluates the world and decides whether it will intervene in it, disqualifying the existing transcendental and supplementing it with the positive effects of the axioms that consist in the maximal existence of the formerly inexistent objects.

Thus, while the governance of the world emphasizes its complexity and the relativity of every judgment on it, politics reduces the world to the simplicity of a point and renders its judgment absolute in the manner of an either-or decision. That the decision takes a binary form follows logically from the understanding of the object of politics as the inexistent of the world. The task of political praxis is to transform inexistence, an absolute (non-) value, into maximal existence, an absolute value for the world in question. Thus, the logics of politics and governance are diametrically opposed to each other: while politics simplifies the world for the purposes of its transformation, governance makes it more complex for the purposes of its reproduction. Whereas the logic of governance consists in the infinite proliferation of relative degrees of appearance between the minimum and the maximum, politics absolutizes the question of appearance in the world in terms of an all-or-nothing division between the maximum and the minimum, existence and inexistence, affirmation and negation.

Badiou provides us with two extreme examples of worlds constituted respectively by politics and governance. *Atonic* worlds are those whose transcendental is devoid of points and which are therefore wholly apolitical:

Atonic worlds are simply worlds which are so ramified and nuanced – or so quiescent and homogeneous – that no instance of the Two, and consequently no figure of decision is capable of evaluating them. That's the kind of happiness that the advocates of democratic materialism dream of: nothing happens but for the death that we do our best to put out of sight. Everything is organized and everything is guaranteed. Nothing will happen anymore, so it is impossible to decide anything. The modern apologia for the 'complexity' of the world, invariably seasoned with praise for the democratic movement, is really nothing but a desire for a generalized atony. (Badiou, 2009b: 420)

The atonic world is completely dominated by its transcendental, which manages its complexity by the infinite proliferation of ordering categories, distinctions, classifications that would be adequate to the awe-inspiring multiplicity of the beings of the world. It is precisely in the approach to multiplicity that politics and governance differ. In its axioms of being-in-the-World, politics *also* affirms the multiplicity of beings of the world as their very mode of being. Yet, in this very affirmation it renounces the very idea of ordering this multiplicity according to positive predicates of identity, rendering it consistent and manageable. On the contrary, politics draws the conclusion from the ontological facticity of

multiplicity that is completely opposite to that of governance: the infinite multiplicity of the beings of any world authorizes not the deployment of instruments of government to capture these beings in their *difference* but the reduction of the content of politics to what is the *same* for whatever comprises this multiplicity, namely community, equality and freedom. Whereas atonic worlds treat multiplicity as the *cause* of complexity, politics approaches multiplicity as essentially *simple*.

If this tendency for simplification predominates in the world, it becomes what Badiou terms a *tensed* world, in which every transcendental degree is a point: '[decision], which is nowhere in an atonic world, is everywhere in a tensed world. That's when life, point by point, gives you no respite, attuned as it is to the tension of everything that appears.' (Ibid: 422-423, 446-447) This is the world, in which everything is indeed political, in which every aspect falls under the requirement of political evaluation. In this manner, the complex network of differences that constitutes the order of the world is reduced to a series of points for a binary decision. This simplifying reduction is what grants politics its singular *power*, which permits it to overcome the transcendental inertia that would otherwise make any novelty and transformation impossible: 'The laws of the world (transcendental objectivities) have no use for points and all tend towards indifference or non-choice (towards atony).' (Ibid.: 431) Yet, as we shall argue in detail in Chapter 3, this power of politics also poses a danger to the world, in which it is applied, and, since politics only exists in the world, to politics itself: a tensed world, in which everything is up for a decision is permanently at the risk of self-destruction. While existence in an atonic world is utterly *pointless*, in the tensed world it is unbearably *restless*.

These two extreme examples demonstrate the necessary link between political affirmation and the absolute. In an atonic world, everything is relative to its place in the transcendental order, which alone is absolutized as the condition of the objectivity of the world as such: *all there is* is the infinite complexity of the world *as it is*, in its infinite nuance and detail, the immanent process of becoming and differentiation, the pluralization and fragmentation of identities, etc. In this world, where everything changes all the time, the only thing that remains the same is the existence of some kind of transcendental order that makes the world hang together. The positive features of that order may and do change permanently; indeed, modification is the very mode of being of every transcendental, not only of the modern 'self-revolutionizing' capitalism. Everything in the world can thus be relativized as contingent, as long as there remains that which it is contingent *upon*, i.e. the sheer presence of the transcendental order.

On the contrary, in a tensed world this very existence of the transcendental is rendered contingent and subjected to a decision that may disqualify it in its affirmation of the maximal existence of the inexistent. What world politics relativizes is the necessity of the transcendental order as such: introducing into the world the three axioms, in terms of which this order is to be evaluated negatively, political practice declares that the existence of this or *any other* particular world is in no way necessary and must be transformed in accordance with the axioms. The transcendental of the world is thus made relative to the axioms that are in turn absolutized.

At this point we must distinguish between two senses of the absolute. As descriptions of the brute facticity of being-in-the-World, subtracted from all positive intra-worldly determinations, the three political axioms can *only* be absolute, since there is nothing in the void that they could be relative to (see Prozorov, 2013, chapter 3). Yet, when we speak of the production of the *effects* of these axioms in positive worlds that are by definition limited and particular, what intra-worldly form could this absolute possibly take? What does it mean to affirm absolute freedom, equality and community in the worlds, in which the only absolute is the principle of transcendental organization as such? After all, world politics does not consist in transforming the positivity of worlds into the absolute nothingness of the World, in which beings would be absolutely free, equal and in common. The condition of being-in-the-World is only accessible from within the positivity of the world as the subtraction from or suspension of that positivity – one never *really* stands out in the nothing. Yet, it is impossible to *produce*, within the positivity of the world, something like an absolutely free person, two absolutely equal beings or a universal community. Such a production would be a contradiction in terms, since we have defined freedom, equality and community in terms of their *transcendence* of any positive world whatsoever and accessible only by means of subtraction from all intra-worldly predicates. Insofar as the axioms transcend the positivity of the world, their absolute character cannot be attained empirically within the world's immanence – otherwise, this immanence would have to be the ontic correlate of the World as such and hence the Whole, whose non-existence is the starting point for our entire inquiry (see Prozorov, 2013, chapter 1).

What the absolute refers to *inside* the world is the transcendental degree of the existence of its beings, which in the process of political affirmation is transformed from the absolute (non-) value of the minimum to the absolute value of the maximum. It is this transformation that Badiou terms the 'existential absolutization of the inexistent': what was nothing in the world, what was proscribed from appearance despite its being, comes not merely to occupy some (minor) place in the world but is endowed with maximal existence. Moreover, since the axioms in question are universal, this maximal existence is not a particular privilege transferred from one class of beings to another but is rather bestowed on the inexistent *along with all the other beings of the world*. Yet, this does not mean that these beings (and all the others) are now absolutely free, equal and in common in the ontic sense, but only that they now exist maximally in this world, which calls for the positive transformation of the transcendental of the world that formerly denied them existence in it. Since every world is infinite, this transformation may also be an infinite process, producing emancipatory, egalitarian and communitarian effects amidst the infinitely ramified complexity of the world. Since political affirmation lacks any teleological necessity, this process may involve negotiation and compromise, resistance and betrayal, stagnation and reversals. It may indeed expire at any moment due to the lack of fidelity to it on the part of political subjects or their weakness in the confrontation with the established powers of the world. In this case, the transcendental order would be restored and some beings of the world will again be consigned to inexistence. And yet, despite this utter contingency of the political process, which, as we shall see in Chapter 3, has no guarantees of success whatsoever, the ascent of the inexistent object to maximal existence remains an absolute fact that can only be relativized by the transcendental if the entire political sequence is extinguished.

Moreover, this idea of the absolute is neither an extreme and irresponsible utopia nor its totalitarian institutional embodiment, but something so familiar to us that it appears almost self-evident. Let us consider the case of universal suffrage. The struggle for universal suffrage in the late 19th-early 20th century did not affirm a relative enhancement of the degree of appearance of e.g. women in the world, so that they would exist 'slightly more', e.g. as free beings without becoming politically equal to men or full members of their community. Nor was it content with granting maximal existence in the world to *some* women on the basis of a particular identitarian predicate, be it the level of education or eloquence, the colour of skin or hair, etc. While such scenarios might well be offered as a compromise by the existing authorities of the world, it makes no sense whatsoever politically, since what is affirmed in politics is that all the beings of the world are *always already* free, equal and in common in the ontological sense and any ontic transformation of the status of women or other inexistent groups must be founded on this ontological maximality, even if no ontic order could ever strictly 'correspond' to it. For this reason, political struggle maximally affirms all three axioms at the same time, demanding full political freedom for women, their full equality with men and the full co-belonging of the two sexes to the same community.

What takes place when universal suffrage is attained is the ascent of women from absolute inexistence in the political segment of the transcendental to maximal existence there, whereby they attain the same political freedoms with men, which is another way of saying that they attain political equality with men, which in turn is another way of saying that they

join the formerly exclusively male political community. Crucially, it is not a matter of the in-existent attaining maximal existence at the price of negating some other being that formerly existed to the maximal degree, e.g. men. Such a politics would merely overturn the hierarchy while leaving the hierarchical mode of order intact. Since the political sequence in question demanded *universal* suffrage, the maximal degree of existence that women have gained is in fact granted to all the beings of the world, including those who previously possessed it. Yet, while no beings are disqualified from existence, something certainly ends up negated and destroyed in this process. Indeed, from a logical standpoint something *must* be negated, since every world must have its proper in-existent (Badiou, 2009b: 342): the transcendental always has a minimal degree of appearance, to which must correspond a real 'atom' (see *ibid.*: 159-160, 250-251). Thus, 'there where existence now stands the in-existent must return. The worldly order is not subverted to the point of being able to demand that a logical law of worlds be abolished. Every object has one proper in-existent. [And] if the latter sublimates itself in absolute existence, another element of the site must cease to exist.' (*Ibid.*: 379-380)

The crucial point, to which we shall return to in Chapter 4, is that this 'element' need not be a being of the world. If it had to be an actual worldly being, politics would forever remain tragic, constitutively unable to attain the universality that defines it. If beings could only attain maximal existence at the expense of *other* beings, universality would be impossible and politics would be nothing but a historical series of hegemonies of some over others, where nothing changes but the specific occupant of the locus of in-existence. Fortunately, this is not the case. What takes the place of the in-existent in world-political praxis is the

aspect of the transcendental order that authorized that inexistence and itself existed maximally in the world, e.g. ideas, beliefs or prejudices that legitimized the rule of some over others; rules, norms and statutes that authorized discrimination and domination on the basis of these ideas; the institutions of confinement or punishment that enforced these rules, etc. What became inexistent with the introduction of universal suffrage was the legitimacy of domination based on gender and this destruction was just as absolute as the rise of women to maximal existence. By the same token, we might speak of the absolute inexistence of death penalty, child labour or the criminalization of homosexuality in contemporary Europe – what is resigned to inexistence in political praxis are not beings but segments or categories of the transcendental that were originally constituted by the negation of the political axioms.

Thus, both the rise of the inexistent object of world politics to existence and the retreat of the maximally existent aspect of the transcendental into inexistence are absolute and politics therefore conforms to the binary logic of the treatment of points. Yet, this certainly does not entail the over-enthusiastic claim that the beings of the world that have risen to maximal existence in it immediately attain, in their positive worldly existence, the absolute degree of freedom, equality and community that characterizes the subtractive state of being-in-the-World. The extension of suffrage to women did not render them absolutely free, absolutely equal to men and belonging to an absolutely non-exclusive community with them. Universal suffrage only made it possible to *continue* to affirm these axioms in a variety of other domains of the world (household, work, education, art, etc.): if women exist politically to the same maximal degree as men, why cannot the same degree of existence be

attained in other domains? (see e.g. Rancière, 1995: 49-50, 2010: 68-69) The attainment of maximal existence in one region of the world serves as a support for continuous affirmation of the axioms in other regions without guaranteeing the success of this affirmation. The attainment of the absolute therefore does not mean the completion of the political procedure but rather conditions the possibility of persisting in fidelity to the original intervention that affirmed the axioms of the World universally for this world. Since every world is infinite, it follows that the number of elements lumped together under the category of the inexistent may also be infinite and belong to most diverse segments of the world, sharing nothing else but the minimal degree of existence therein. Hence, the world-political procedure is itself also necessarily infinite.

In fact, it is infinite in *three* different senses. Firstly, because the number of worlds is infinite, politics is never short of a world, in which to apply itself. Secondly, because every world is internally infinite, politics is never short of an object of the world, in which an element is inexistent. Finally, since the axioms of the World are ontologically absolute, the production of their intra-worldly effects can only be infinite, since there is no limit to the positive consequences to be deduced from the facticity of being-in-the-World: the very indeterminacy of freedom, equality and community, understood as ontological axioms, ensures that one can always affirm *more* of each as long as one affirms them together.⁴ We can *always* perceive the ontological difference between the radical freedom, equality and community of our being and their inadequate realization in the worlds we inhabit. While it might appear difficult to reconcile the infinity of the process of affirmation with the idea of the absolutization of existence that implies a finite action, we must keep in mind that

existence is not an ontological but an ontic category, denoting the intensity of appearance in the world. While the rise of the in-existent to maximal existence is indeed a finite act, the maximal degree of appearance in a world should not be confused with the attainment of the ontologically absolute character of freedom, equality and community. The 'intra-worldly absolute' merely refers to that which appears to the strongest degree in this particular world, hence both the scope of the objects subsumed under it and the intensity of their degree of appearance may always be enhanced, so that the maximum itself ends up *maximized* in its existence with no possibility to stipulate an end to this process.

Nonetheless, this triple infinity of the world-political process does not resign world politics to perpetual deferral, whereby it remains an 'unfinished project' whose actualization remains always 'to come'. The infinity of the political procedure does not exclude concrete acts of existential absolutization as a matter of the 'finite inscription of the infinite' (Nancy, 2010: 31). There is nothing deferred, unfinished or 'to come' about universal suffrage, the abolition of slavery or the prohibition of torture, even as these changes certainly do not *complete* the transformation of our worlds in accordance with the axioms of the World. In fact, it is the very idea of completion that must be discarded as an illusion that endangers the political process as such. As we shall argue in detail in Chapter 3, the very desire for such a completion produces the temptation of attaining the infinite by transforming the world in question *into* the void of the World through the destruction of its beings. We would do well to refrain from sublimating or romanticizing the infinity of the political process, as if it were a 'sacred exception' (Badiou, 2008a: 110): infinity is a perfectly ordinary and normal condition of any world: 'just like every multiple situation, 'we' are infinite, and the finite a

lacunary abstraction.’ (ibid.) If there is anything to marvel at in politics, it is not infinity, which, when stripped of the romantic aura, appears entirely banal, but rather the finite effects of political affirmation that transform these infinite worlds. That finite zones of maximal freedom, equality and community may be created within the infinity of orderly existence – this is what is genuinely awesome about politics. Political praxis produces only finite effects of maximized existence, always falling short of dominating the infinity of infinite worlds, yet it does so absolutely, radically transforming the domains in which it is applied. The impossibility of completing the political procedure is not its constitutive defect that would resign it to maudlin impotence or brutal frustration, but rather the source of hope that its finite effects would continue to be produced, infinitely.

Subtraction and Subjectivation

Since we define politics as the practice of the affirmation of the axioms of the World within a positive world, then the subject must similarly be defined affirmatively in terms of its fidelity to the axioms. While we shall also analyze reactive and obscure modes of subjectivity that consist in the negation of the axioms, our affirmative definition of politics renders these modes epiphenomenal and logically dependent on the faithful subject as the negations of the effects of its practice. We must therefore begin with the definition of the faithful subject as the practitioner of the affirmation of the axioms of the World within the world. Our account of the object of world politics permits us to understand how this affirmation may take place in the world. We have argued that the object of world politics is that which inexists in the world in question, the ‘nothing of the world’ that is to become

‘everything’ if all three axioms are affirmed to the maximal degree. The subject of world politics must then be defined in relation to this object as a being that *raises* the inexistent to maximal existence. Yet, what *is* this being and what is *its own* degree of existence in the world? If the subject is itself an inexistent element of the world, how can it act therein to maximize its existence? Conversely, if the subject enjoys full and robust existence in the world, what does it know or care of the inexistent? In short, how does the subject emerge in relation to the inexistent?

Slavoj Žižek once attributed to Lacan the elementary definition of the subject as ‘that which is not an object’ (Žižek 1995). Transferring this apparently self-evident statement from the psychoanalytic context to the Badiouan phenomenology of worlds, we shall posit it as the starting point for our theory of the subject: the *subject is that which is not an object of the world*, insofar as the object is defined as the transcendental indexing of a being, its regulated mode of appearing in the world (Badiou, 2009b: 199-230). Any being, be it inorganic, animal or human, becomes an object of the world as soon as it is indexed on its transcendental and is endowed with a positive identity or a plurality of them. To say that the subject cannot be an object is thus to say that it is irreducible to any intra-worldly identity. And yet, the subject cannot simply be *transcendent* in relation to the world, since the latter is the only possible site for its activity: while world politics is a politics *of* the World, there is no politics *in* the World, which is void.

Thus, the subject necessarily comes to appearance within the world, yet this appearance is irreducible to that of a worldly object: the subject is *in* the world but not (wholly) *of* the world. In other words, the subject exists within the world but as an *exception* to its objectivity. 'Every subject persists insofar as it resists its conversion into an object.' (Hallward, 2003: 242) In the terms of Badiou's approach in *Logics of Worlds*, the subject is a body (a positive intra-worldly being or group of beings) that is capable of producing effects that transcend the order of 'bodies and languages' that positively regulates this world (Badiou, 2009b: 45). The subject is precisely '[the] 'except that', the 'but for' through which the fragile scintillation of what has no place to be makes its incision in the unbroken phrasing of a world. '(What) has no place to be' should be taken in both possible senses: as that which, according to the transcendental law of the world, should not be; but also as that which subtracts itself (out of place) from the worldly localization of multiplicities, from the place of being, in other words, from being-there.' (Ibid.)

What subtracts itself from being-there, from a determinate place in the world, is nothing other than what we have termed 'being-in-the-World', the mode of appearance that is the source of the three axioms of politics. The subject is thus an intra-worldly being or group of beings that raises the inexistence of the world to maximal existence, yet it also traverses inexistence itself, insofar as it subtracts itself from the transcendental order and appears in its being-in-the-World. Insofar as the subject has its entire consistency in its affirmation of the political axioms, it is not defined by its intra-worldly identity, be it individual or collective, but rather by its subtraction from this identity. For this reason, it is pointless to make any distinction between individual and collective subjects. Rather than attempt to

grasp the subject as *a* being defined by certain individual or collective predicates, we shall approach it as a mode of existence, into which a worldly being can enter (as well as leave). Rather than *be* a subject, one is *in* the subject, in a mode of existence, which is more singular than any individual (since it exposes one's being as such) and more universal than any collective (since it is devoid of any distinction or predicate).

Let us now elucidate this paradoxical mode of existence in the world as an exception to its order. Evidently, the subject of politics cannot form an exception in the sense of transcending the transcendental of the world – this mode of exceptionality rather characterizes the Schmittian sovereign who sustains the hegemonic pseudo-universality of a positive world by transgressing its order. Instead, the subject remains immanent to the world, yet its subjection to its intra-worldly identity functions according to the Lacanian logic of the 'not-all' (Lacan, 2000: 72-81): it is *there* in the world but *not all there*, evading any subsumption under an intra-worldly predicate (see Prozorov, 2013, chapter 4 for a more detailed discussion). This is why it is impossible to understand subjectivation in terms of plenitude of identity: the subject is not a worldly being *plus* a certain 'transworldly' bonus of subjectivity gained through fidelity to the political axioms, but rather a worldly being *minus* its maximal degree of existence in the world: in terms of its degree of existence the subject is always *less than the object*.

As we have argued in *Ontology and World Politics* (Prozorov, 2013), the same 'not-all' formula of subtractive subjectivation defines the community affirmed by the respective

axiom of the World. There is no being that could be denied belonging to this community, since no identitarian predicate defines this community and can be a possible criterion for exclusion. As an ontological axiom, community is in a strict sense universal without exception, an open and non-totalizable set composed of singularities that have no discernible common predicate. This homology permits us to define political subjectivity and world-political community in terms of each other: the subject, whether individual or collective, is defined by its belonging to the community affirmed by world politics, while this community is in turn defined as the infinite and non-totalizable set of world-political subjects that appear in it 'one by one' in their singularity that cannot be subsumed under any predicate. Every subject, irrespectively of its composition, is a finite fragment of the infinite process of political affirmation.

Thus, the subtractive process of subjectivation consists in the *deactivation* of one's worldly identity or, in Badiou's more technical terms, the weakening of one's degree of existence in the world. The formation of the political subject inverts the logic of existential absolutization that we have addressed above. While the object of politics rises from inexistence to maximal existence, the subject of politics must first slide down the existential ladder of the world, only to be resurrected to maximal existence *together* with the inexistent object as a result of political practice, which, to recall, affirms maximal existence *for all*. Obviously, this does not mean ceasing to exist in the sense of death or an asthentic or withered state – on the contrary, being a subject is an experience of extreme existential intensity (cf. Badiou, 2009b: 507-514). This weakening pertains strictly to the degree of one's positive existence as an object of the world. In order to become the subject of politics, of the affirmation of

universality amid the infinity of particular worlds, the worldly being must dis-identify with its particular objective standing or its 'place in the world' and in this manner merge, if only momentarily, with the inexistent object.

This experience of dis-identification strangely recalls states of symbolic destitution that we commonly tend to associate with the states of 'desubjectivation' rather than any ascent to subjectivity. Yet, as Giorgio Agamben has argued at length in various contexts, subjectivation and desubjectivation are not mutually exclusive but rather mutually constitutive, so that the subject is nothing but the witness to its own desubjectivation, its loss of intra-worldly identity. In Agamben's linguistic theory of subjectivation the subject is always necessarily split between the poles of subjectivation (the passage of the living being into language) and desubjectivation (the expropriation of the living being in the purely linguistic existence of the subject as a mere pronoun 'I' that indicates the instance of discourse) (Agamben, 1999b: 87-135; 1995: 95-97). In order to be constituted as a subject of language, the individual must undergo the expropriation of its concrete living being and enter the abstract linguistic system, identifying itself with the absolutely insubstantial shifter 'I'. On the other hand, once constituted as the subject of enunciation, the subject does not encounter the wealth of meaning to be transmitted, but rather the web of signifiers beyond its control. 'The subject has no other content than its own desubjectivation; it becomes witness to its own disorder, its own oblivion as a subject.' (Agamben, 1999b: 106)

How is this experience of (de)subjectivation possible within a transcendently regulated world? As we have argued, the transcendental of every world prescribes a myriad of particular identities that the subject may assume and move between, ranging from one's official self-description to the obscene 'secret self'. What this distribution of positive identities must necessarily exclude is the void of the World itself, which is ontologically a universal part of any world but cannot come to appearance within it without destroying its consistency. It is only when the World is disclosed within a world in an ontological mood, be it boredom, anxiety or any other subtractive experience, that beings of the world appear in their being-in-the-World and the axioms of the World become accessible for the first time. The possibility of subjectivation is thus conditioned by the disclosure of the void of the World as the ontological condition of possibility of every world and the condition of the impossibility of the consistency of its objective immanence. Since the World as a universal part may always come to appear in the world and reveal the inconsistent multiplicity of being beneath the veneer of positively ordered appearance, the subtraction from one's intra-worldly identity remains a permanent possibility in every world. There can only be a subject because the object is 'not all', i.e. because the objectivity of the world is inconsistent, harbouring the void within itself.

And yet, the subtractive experience of 'standing out in the Nothing' is evidently an anomalous mode of dwelling within a world, whose transcendental order serves precisely to insulate the positivity of the world from any irruption of the World and thereby stabilize the existence of worldly beings in their assigned identities. In the absence of any disclosure of the World worldly beings are defined by their intra-worldly identity or their 'place' in the

world (Badiou, 2009c: 4-12). We may term these beings *(wo)men of the world* with a proviso that this conventional expression may in principle also apply to non-human beings (see Prozorov, 2013, chapter 3). To recall the dichotomy between the positive stability of 'place' and the disruption of 'force' in Badiou's *Theory of the Subject* (2009c: 13-50), a (wo)man of the world is a wholly *placed* being, whose interest consists in having every disorderly force neutralized so that everything and everyone would remain in their place. Such a being is evidently oriented towards the maintenance of the atonic world of infinite complexity, requiring expert management that protects the existing order against disturbances, enabling everyone to 'succeed' in finding their own 'place in the world'.

The phenomenon of voluntary servitude, famously analyzed by Etienne de la Boetie in the middle of the 16th century (2008 [1576]) and widely addressed in modern political philosophy, particularly in the light of the Nazi and Stalinist experiences of the 20th century, becomes easier to understand in the context of the phenomenology of worlds. Rather than exemplify renunciation, perversion or escape from one's originary freedom, voluntary servitude actually characterizes one's everyday experience of being in the world, an inauthentic mode of everydayness that Heidegger terms 'falling' (*Verfallen*) and associates with *das Man* (Heidegger, 1962: 219-224, 274-281). Since one always finds oneself 'thrown' into the world, constituted as a positive, transcendently indexed being within it, one's everyday comportment in the world is understandably oriented towards maintaining, reproducing and securing this indexing, which we perceive as our innermost identity. The participation in the reproduction of the order of the world through the identification with one's place in it is not the exception but the rule. As Heidegger remarks, falling being-in-the-

World is simultaneously *tempting* and *tranquilizing*, offering both enjoyment and security, the enjoyment of security and the security of enjoyment (ibid.: 221-222). In fact, for this servitude even to appear *as* servitude and not as the free expression of one's worldly identity, something must happen that would weaken the hold of this identity on one's being.

In contrast to the normality of voluntary servitude, politics (and world politics as a mode of politics most adequate to its concept) is an exceptional force that disrupts the order of distributed and differentiated places in its affirmation of freedom (from places), equality (of places) and community (without regard to place). To a (wo)man of the world, wholly reducible to its series of identities, this affirmation can only appear as meaningless turmoil that achieves nothing but the *dis-placement* of everything, making a mess of this world. Whatever problems there might be with freedom, equality and community in the world (and all sensible people would agree that the world is not perfect), they are best dealt with by the established authorities through constructive adjustments and piecemeal improvements. After all, do not these authorities also affirm, profusely and eloquently, freedom, equality and community? There is thus always already a foundation for constructive cooperation that would ensure orderly progress towards greater freedom, equality and community in our world. The partisans of politics must merely abandon their idealistic illusions about absolute emancipation, full equality or non-exclusive community to realize that the existing authorities are already doing the best they can in this direction and, while it would not hurt to give them a little push forward once or twice, an antagonistic

relationship with the powers of the world would only jeopardize the gains already made in making the world 'a better place' and making one's own place in it better as well.

This line of reasoning exemplifies the *reactive* mode of subjectivity, which seeks to subsume the content of the axioms under the existing transcendental order. If political affirmation persists in its destabilization of the transcendental, the reactive mode may be transformed into a less tolerant stance, characteristic of the *obscure* subject. After all, when political praxis takes disruptive forms, from strikes and occupations that jeopardize the pursuit of one's affairs in the economic network of the world to the leaks of government secrets that jeopardize one's sense of intra-worldly security, things have certainly gone too far. What began as the movement in the name of perfectly agreeable ideals of freedom, equality and community has gone terribly wrong and been hijacked by extremists of all guises, from know-nothing students looking for an excuse to riot to professional terrorists, bent on destroying our 'way of life'. It is therefore imperative to restore the world to its senses by giving emergency powers to security services that alone are capable of dealing with the threat to the very existence of the world as it is and thus to *our* very existence as worldly beings. The effects of radical political affirmation of freedom, equality and community must be destroyed in the name of the protection of life, not Agamben's 'bare life', which is entirely indifferent to the world it appears in, but rather the intra-worldly form of life, the regulated existence of bodies and languages distributed into places. While this positive form of life is to be secured, the displaced and disidentified existence that constitutes a political subject is to be destroyed in its positive effects, if not in the sheer facticity of its being.

As long as a being of the world identifies completely with its place in it, any disruption of the particularistic and hierarchical order of places will be perceived as a threat to be countered reactively or obscurely, rather than an event to be faithful to. It is important to note that this negative response of the (wo)men of the world to political affirmation has nothing to do with their ontological (or, for that matter, anthropological) characteristics and everything to do with their identification with their place in the world. Reactive or obscure negation of politics does not arise from the *being* of beings but from the coincidence of the worldly being with its place in the world that leads to the perception of every political practice as threatening the order that ensures the stability of these places. As long as the existence of a worldly being is reduced to persistence in its worldly place, the preservation of the worldly order, including the preservation of its inexistent objects, is literally an existential necessity. For politics to have any hold on the being of the world, its identity with its own objective placing in it must firstly be rendered non-maximal. Thus, to bring the inexistent of the world to maximal existence, the subject must first risk its own inexistence in the world, occupying the ontological mood, in which it is exposed to the axioms of the World.

As Not: World Politics and the Messianic Imperative

This understanding of subjectivity as conditioned by the traversal of inexistence resonates with recent attempts in political philosophy to critically re-engage with the heritage of Judeo-Christian messianic thought, particularly Pauline messianism (Derrida, 1994, 2005; Žižek 2001, 2011b; Nancy, 2008; Badiou, 2001b; Taubes, 2004; Critchley, 2012). In the First Letter to the Corinthians Paul explicitly identifies the messianic subject of ‘being in Christ’

with the in-existent, the 'refuse of the world, the offscouring of all things' (1 Cor. 4, 13, cited in Badiou, 2001b: 56). The position of the messianic subject in its world is thus from the outset characterized by lack, weakness and ultimately non-being. Yet, it is precisely this status of inexistence in the world that confers upon the subject the power of radical transformation of the world: 'God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are.' (1. Cor. 27-28, cited in Badiou, 2001b: 47. See also Critchley, 2012: 157-165) The messianic subject traverses inexistence in its world, becoming 'the thing that is not', in order to absolutize the existence of the in-existent and thereby transform the transcendental order of the world, 'bringing to nothing things that are'.

More specifically, our definition of the political subject as the worldly being that subtracts itself from worldly determinations accords with Agamben's interpretation of St Paul in the *Time that Remains* (2005b). For Agamben, the paradigm of the ethos of the messianic subject is provided by the Pauline expression 'as not' (*hos me*), used in the First Letter to the Corinthians to describe messianic time as a 'contracted' or recapitulated mode of temporality:

But this I say, brethren, time contracted itself, the rest is, that even those having wives may be as not having, and those weeping as not weeping, and those rejoicing as not rejoicing, and those buying as not possessing, and those using the world as

not using it up. For passing away is the figure of this world. But I wish you to be without care. (I Cor. 7: 29-32, cited in Agamben, 2005b: 23)

The formula 'as not' must be distinguished both from the affirmation of the identity of the opposites (e.g. weeping is *the same as* not weeping) and the identification of one term with another (e.g. weeping is *in fact* rejoicing). Instead, its significance is contained in the tension within the concept itself, which is undermined from within by the revocation of its content without altering its form. The 'as not' should thus be kept rigorously distinct from the rather more familiar form of 'as if', which, from Kant onwards, was widely used in philosophy, e.g. in Adorno's 'post-Auschwitz ethics', to posit fictitious conditions as 'regulative ideas', guiding action in the present (Agamben, 2005b: 36-37. See also Taubes, 2004: 53-54, 74-76). In contemporary political philosophy, this logic is operative in the Derridean version of messianism, whose famous slogan of 'democracy to come' presupposes, precisely by virtue of its clear distinction from something like a 'future democracy' (see Derrida, 2005: 90-93), that it is never actually going to arrive (i.e. it will remain 'to come' at any point in the future) but must rather motivate contemporary praxis *as if* it were already here.

On the contrary, the Pauline 'as not' does not leave the subject any vantage point, from which one could profess the 'as if' fiction of the already redeemed humanity: 'The messianic vocation dislocates and, above all, nullifies the entire subject.' (Agamben, 2005b: 41) The subject of the messianic vocation experiences 'the *Aufhebung* of every 'as if', every 'regulative idea' in its coincidence with factual reality, the saved being entirely coextensive

with the irreparably ruined' (ibid.: 43). Rather than be endowed with a privileged, if entirely fictive, perspective, from which to imagine the scene of redemption, the subject of messianic politics is internally undermined by the coincidental operation of the logics of conservation and nullification.

Thus, Agamben's messianic subject is an intra-worldly being that subtracts itself from its identity and place in the world, continuing to inhabit it in the 'as not' or 'not all' mode. This formula does not mean that one inhabits one's world as an empty space (the void of the World) but rather refers to the suspension of its positive order of exclusions, hierarchies and restrictions in the practices of fidelity to the axioms of the World. This suspension requires neither the exodus from the world into fantasy and fiction nor the violent destruction of the world, but rather calls for existence in the world in the condition of the perpetual tension between its conservation as a dwelling place and its nullification as the prescriptive order of places. It is not a matter of transcending the world but rather of rendering its transcendental inoperative. Thus, it is possible to understand Agamben's minimalist approach to messianism as the 'tiny displacement' that leaves things 'almost intact' (Agamben, 1993: 53. See also Agamben, 1999a: 164), but nonetheless makes all the difference. What this displacement consists in is precisely the weakening of the degree of one's intra-worldly existence, the dis-identification with one's place in the world, which enables the subject to 'reside in the world without becoming a term in it' (Coetzee, 1985: 228).

In Agamben's theory of politics this movement down the existential ladder of the world is the sole telos of politics which dispenses with every positive project of transformation in favour of the affirmation of inoperativity as the originary ethos of humanity (Agamben, 2000: 140-142; 2004: 85-87, 2010: 104-112; 2011: 245-253). This renunciation of all future-oriented transformative action is understandable in the context of messianic politics, which, despite its assurances to the contrary (Agamben, 2005b: 62-73; Derrida, 1994: 61-95), can never entirely break with the eschatological problematic. If we already dwell in the time that remains, if the end of days is indeed near, then it is simply not worth our while to take the risk of a frontal confrontation with the existing order, given its imminent decline, withering away or collapse. This is the interpretation that Jacob Taubes offered of Paul's invocation of the logic of the 'as not' in 1 Corinthians 7:

[This] means: under this time pressure, if tomorrow the whole palaver, the entire swindle were going to be over – in that case, there is no point in any revolution. That's absolutely right, I would give the same advice. Demonstrate obedience to state authority, pay taxes, don't do anything bad, don't get involved in conflicts – for heaven's sake, do not stand out! (Taubes, 2004: 54)⁵

Of course, the affirmation of inoperativity might also proceed from the wager that one's mere disengagement from the world might be crucial in *accelerating* this demise by virtue of destabilizing the transcendental order of places. In the *Ethics of Postcommunism* (Prozorov, 2009a) we have traced this logic of inoperative politics in the social practices of

the late Soviet period, in which frontal dissent was supplanted by an ethos of cultivated disengagement from the positivity of the Soviet world that contributed to the radical, if relatively peaceful, unravelling of the system in the 1980s, precisely at the moment it sought to found itself anew on the basis of greater societal involvement in the Perestroika period. Thus, there may be good strategic reasons to restrict political practice to the subtraction from the transcendental, since rendering various aspects of the transcendental inoperative might be sufficient to deactivate or even destroy the entire order. Nonetheless, as the post-Soviet society found out to its eventual disappointment, the transcendental of the world may well maintain itself in the partly deactivated or inoperative condition, just as it may easily tolerate the diminished 'as not' existence of some of its objects. The sheer deactivation of the ordering force of the transcendental does nothing to raise the inexistent objects of this world to existence and thus does not enhance freedom, equality or community in the world in question. This is why the world-political subject must go beyond the minimally messianic disengagement from the world in the 'as not' mode towards the actual redemption of the world, i.e. its positive transformation on the basis of the axioms that arise from the world's own being.

Who Can be the Subject? Beyond Spontaneism and Dogmatism

Let us now address the implications of the subtractive logic of subjectivation for the composition of the political subject. Is political subjectivity restricted to certain beings of the world or can every worldly being in principle become a faithful subject of politics? In *Being and Event*, Badiou discusses two diametrically opposite answers to this question, *spontaneism* and *dogmatism*. The spontaneist approach asserts that 'the only ones who can

take part in an event are those who made it such' (Badiou, 2005a: 237) or, more technically, 'a multiple is only connected to an event if it belongs to it' (ibid.: 237). In this approach, the only possible subject of a political sequence is the one defined by the predicate that this politics affirms, e.g. working classes in labor politics, women in feminist politics, ethnic minorities in the politics of minority rights. In the phenomenological terms of *Logics of Worlds*, spontaneism is qualified as the claim that the political subject must originally belong to the evental trace, i.e. the inexistent that comes to exist maximally as a result of the event (2009b: 391-396, 468-475). This approach would therefore reduce the set of political subjects to the 'subaltern', repressed or marginalized beings that must overcome their inexistence themselves. It is only those who *already* inexistent in the world that can act politically to transform it, while the well-placed '(wo)men of the world' will always end up on the side of the existing order.

This approach, at work in various forms of identity politics, would be catastrophic for the universalist ambition of world politics, since it endows the inexistent object with a normative privilege arising out of its particular ontic features. This paves the way for the understanding of politics as a quasi-transgressive inversion of hierarchies, whereby those 'missing' in the world, lacking a place in it or relegated to the invisible site of suppressed existence, are suddenly given the exclusive 'pride of place' in the world to come *because of* the very same identitarian predicates that formerly authorized their inexistence. In contrast to this valorization of the inexistent, in our approach the only 'value' of the inexistent consists in the sheer *fact* of its inexistence, which logically makes it the object of universal political affirmation.⁶ Indeed, it would be absurd to valorize the inexistent object, since as a

non-decomposable category it may lump together absolutely different beings who only share the fact of having been consigned to inexistence. It does not matter *what* inexists and *why*, nor is there any reason to think that whatever happens to inexist in the world is in any sense 'better' than what exists strongly or maximally – it is sufficient that *there is* the inexistent in the world for the axioms of the World to be negated and for politics to have something to do. The axioms of the World declare the freedom, equality and community of *all* beings in the world, which logically includes the inexistent, but does not endow the members of the inexistent set with any privilege. Thus, the procedure of world politics is entirely heterogeneous to the affirmation of particular identities, even marginalized and suppressed ones, and only deals with this marginalization or suppression as a point of departure for universal affirmation.

By the same token, the notion of inexistence permits us to reconsider the privilege granted in contemporary ethico-political philosophy to the figure of the Other (Levinas, 1999; Derrida, 1995, 1996. For a critique see Badiou, 2001a: 18-29). The inexistent is by definition the Other of any non-minimally existing worldly being, simply because, in contrast to the latter, it does not appear in the world *at all*. Yet, this alterity is not the *property* of the other itself, according to which it could be valorized or devalued, but rather the *function* of the transcendental, which relegates various beings of the world to various degrees of existence, including the minimal one. It is this *function* that politics seeks to overturn, without any regard for the particular identities that happen to be lumped under the rubric of inexistence. Politics targets the otherness of inexistence in the sense of the minimal

transcendental degree and remains utterly indifferent to the alterity of particular worldly beings, which is an elementary fact of ontology.

[Infinite] alterity is quite simply what is. Any experience at all is the infinite deployment of infinite differences. But what we must recognize is that these differences hold no interest for thought, that they amount to nothing more than the infinite and self-evident multiplicity of humankind, as obvious in the difference between me and my cousin from Lyon as it is between the Shiite 'community' of Iraq and the fat cowboys of Texas (Badiou, 2001a: 25-26).

This attitude of indifference to difference appears to run contrary to the critical orientations that translate the ontological insights of 'philosophies of difference' of e.g. Foucault or Deleuze into positive precepts of identity politics. Yet, the indifference in question is arguably already at work in these philosophies themselves, whose affirmation of the primacy of difference on the ontological level should not be confused with the valorization of the different, minoritarian or subaltern in their ontic positivity. For instance, Foucault's famous call for the 'insurrection of subjugated knowledges' (Foucault, 1980: 81) ought to be understood in characteristically Foucauldian austere and minimalist terms, whereby the 'subjugated knowledges' in question are entirely exhausted by the knowledge of their subjugation and have no positive content that would replace the knowledge authorized by the oppressors. As Giorgio Agamben has argued, 'the history of the excluded and defeated [is] completely homogeneous with the history of the victors' (Agamben, 2009b: 98).

Similarly, the Deleuzian affirmation of minor politics is furthest away from the valorization of the particular features of the minorities in question, which for him was a path to a 'micro-fascism': 'Marginals have always inspired fear in us and a slight horror. They are not clandestine enough.' (Deleuze and Parnet, 1989: 139. See more generally Deleuze and Guattari, 1986; Thoburn 2003, chapter 2)

The latter point is crucial from our perspective. The marginals that horrify Deleuze are precisely those members of the inexistent group who make their positive identity (i.e. their *appearance*, currently foreclosed in the world) the foundation of the claim to maximal existence in the world: we appear to be nothing, *but because of what we are*, we desire to become everything. It is to this 'what we are' that world politics is utterly indifferent: in ontological terms, the inexistent is a being *like any other* (free, equal and in common) and in ontic terms it does not appear in the world *at all*, hence there is literally nothing in particular to say about it. Politics is not an *expression* of one's downtroddenness or marginalization, as if they were something to be perversely proud of, but an attempt to *overcome* them, hence no personal experience of these conditions is necessary precisely because there is *nothing positive* in such experiences of being 'counted for nothing'. Thus, the privilege that spontaneism grants to the inexistent must be withdrawn without any hesitation. In order to maximize the existence of the inexistent one need not belong to the inexistent group or be objectively incorporated into it by the transcendental regime of the world, but must rather dissociate oneself from one's place in the world, whatever this place is.

Yet, having discarded spontaneism, we should also be wary of embracing the opposite approach that Badiou terms *dogmatism*, according to which *every* being of the world may become a political subject or, in more technical terms, 'every presented multiple is in fact dependent on the event' (Badiou, 2005a: 237). In terms of our concept of politics, this approach recasts the affirmation of the axioms of the World as the joyful unison of universal affirmation, involving all the beings of the world. If the content of the axioms is universal, i.e. open and accessible to everyone, might not we expect everyone in the world to respond affirmatively to their revelation? This approach expects the political affirmation to seize the entire world at once, suspending its transcendental order of places and making possible its wholesale reconstruction on the basis of the axioms. It therefore ignores the particularizing ordering power of the transcendental, wishing it away as a lifeless and inert pseudo-power of the kind Foucault derided in his famous critique of the 'repressive hypothesis' (Foucault, 1990: 15-49). Yet, a positive world, be it a family, a corporation or a nation-state, may well attain the maximum of tranquility and depoliticization without actual recourse to violence but through a combination of blackmail and seduction, cooptation and conformism, security and enjoyment. The transcendental order of the world is maintained by making its reproduction a matter of *interest* for the beings positively constituted in it. The machine of intra-worldly governance may then run 'by itself' while the world's inhabitants remain content to remain in their prescribed places and in identity with themselves. Any universalist political affirmation would invariably be received by such 'placed' beings as a threat to their secure worldly existence and invite reactive or obscure responses.

Thus, while we reject the spontaneist thesis, we must also reject the dogmatist one. While there is no privileged identity for a political subject and everyone in principle *can* become one, not every being in the world undergoes this becoming, precisely because it does not follow automatically from one's anterior positive identity but rather involves the weakening of its hold on one's existence.⁷ Politics is not a practice that one can engage in while keeping one's worldly identity intact. That is why anyone at all, e.g. workers, aristocrats, Greeks, painters, hypochondriacs, foreigners, cyclists, film stars, can participate in world-political affirmation, but only insofar as they are not only or, better, *not wholly* workers, aristocrats, Greeks, etc. – that there is something *more* in them that makes them always *less* than their worldly identity.

At first glance, this condition by definition applies to those whose degree of existence of the world is *already* minimal and whose being evidently exceeds their appearance, which is nothing. However, it would be incorrect to automatically endow the inexistent objects of the world with the status of faithful subjects of politics. It is equally possible that the beings subsumed under the minimal degree of existence assume the reactive mode of subjectivity, negating the political affirmation in the name of the illusory hope that they can evade their inexistence by obeying and conforming to the transcendental order that renders them inexistent. This quietism of the downtrodden, who hope to cease to be inexistent by diligently behaving *as* the inexistent, is at the very least as prevalent historically as their engagement in political practice. Another possibility, historical examples of which are also numerous, is the assumption by the inexistent beings of the obscure mode of subjectivity, i.e. their active destruction of the effects of political affirmation in the service of the

sovereign power of the transcendental: from the reign of Napoleon III to the paroxysms of Italian fascism and German Nazism we observe the participation of the inexistent of the world in the destruction of the very politics that affirms the maximization of their existence in the world (cf. Thoburn, 2003: 50-58). Thus, those already inexistent in the world are certainly *capable* of assuming political subjectivity, but whether they do so or not is entirely contingent and depends on the actual unfolding of the political sequence, in which faithful, reactive and obscure modes of subjectivity remain available options.

Thus, the possibility of becoming a subject is neither restricted to the inexistent of the world nor open to every worldly being but remains conditioned by the dis-identification from one's place in the world, a weakening of one's degree of existence. This weakening may take place as a matter of the positive transformation of the transcendental order, whereby a formerly existent identity becomes subjugated, excluded or repressed and thus joins the ranks of the inexistent. But, more importantly for our purposes, it may also take place as a result of the immanent change of the worldly being in question, who ceases to be wholly defined by its place in the world and thereby becomes capable of transforming it in accordance with the axioms of the World.

As we have argued in *Ontology and World Politics* (Prozorov, 2013, chapter 2), this change takes place as a result of the disclosure of the World within the world. While Heidegger privileged such specific experiences as boredom and anxiety as exemplars of this World-disclosing ontological mood, we suggest that any experience whatsoever is in principle

capable of effecting the 'subjective destitution' (Žižek, 1999b: 296; Santner, 2011: 44-58, 211) that fractures the unity of one's intra-worldly existence, disturbs the full coincidence of the worldly being with its place in the world and opens its existence to the void of the World. It is possible to be left empty and suspended in limbo as a result of living through a natural disaster or a civil war, of surviving an illness or losing a loved one, but also as a result of far more mundane experiences of reading poetry, observing nature or playing with children. Evidently, the list of such experiences also includes coming into contact, if only by accident, with an ongoing political sequence, which, while by definition threatening the existential security of the (wo)man of the world, might also appear beguiling or even seductive in the manner of the proverbial forbidden fruit. Of course, none of these experiences in themselves guarantee the access to the axioms arising from the disclosure of the World, yet neither does anxiety that could just as well be drowned in drink or boredom that could be escaped by mindless shopping. World-disclosing moods are not defined by their substance but rather by the degree of the subtraction from the world involved in them. What is important to emphasize is that this subtraction is an experience that the worldly being undergoes or suffers rather than decides on in an act of will. The active intervention in the world that declares the validity of the axioms and the practices of fidelity that produce their positive effects are thus conditioned by an essentially *passive* experience, whereby one's worldly existence is affected and minimized. The subject is any being of the world that moves from the experience of this minimization towards the maximization of the existence of what the order of the world declares to inexist.

¹ For an earlier and somewhat different treatment of the concept of the in-existent in Badiou's work see Badiou, 2009c: 259-265. In this work Badiou has not yet made a distinction between being and appearance and the theme of in-existence is addressed in terms of the internal exclusion of the subject and its topological excess over the place it is assigned in the situation or world. Nonetheless, his empirical examples of the in-existent (e.g. immigrant proletariat in the national community) clearly resonate with his later elaboration of this concept in *Logics of Worlds*. See Bosteels, 2011b: 244-249 for a more detailed comparison of the use of the concept in the two texts. We shall return to Badiou's treatment of the in-existent in more detail in Chapter 4.

² In Badiou's typology of change in *Logics of Worlds*, *facts* and *weak singularities* are two intermediate forms of change, located between mere *modification* within the limits of the transcendental and the *event* that ruptures the transcendental. Just as the event, these forms are conditioned by the appearance of a 'site' (a self-belonging set) in the world, yet in the case of a fact, the intensity of its existence in the world is not maximal, while in the case of a weak singularity the consequences of its existence are non-maximal. See more generally Badiou, 2009b: 373-375.

³ See Badiou (2009b: 54-61) for the distinction between reactive and obscure modes of negation. While the reactive subject seeks to erase all traces of the event from the present that resulted from it, neutralizing its force and its recasting as an unproductive 'time of troubles', the obscure subject seeks to destroy the actuality of the present itself, offering instead a phantasmatic vision of a transcendent, harmonious and wholly reconciled world. We have discussed this distinction at length in *Ontology and World Politics* (Prozorov, 2013, chapter 4) and will return to it at the end of the present chapter.

⁴ In *Being and Event* Badiou provides a mathematical demonstration of the latter point. The content of the political procedure is 'truth', which Badiou understands as the indiscernible subset that comprises the elements of the situation connected with the event. Indiscernibility refers to the impossibility of defining the element by any 'encyclopedic determinant' of the situation. Insofar as it is indiscernible, this subset that Badiou also terms 'generic', must be infinite, since if it were finite, all its elements could be discerned by sheer numbering. See Badiou (2005a: 335-343, 367-369). In our terms, the content of political affirmation in the

world is similarly an infinite subset, since it comprises the positive effects of axioms that are radically indiscernible in the positive world.

⁵ While Agamben's reinterpretation of Pauline messianism does not invoke eschatological themes (2005b: 31-43) and explicitly differentiates messianic time from eschatological time (ibid.: 62-78), the wider context of Agamben's work certainly reveals eschatological motifs of its own, be it the permanent theme of the self-destructive tendency of the late-capitalist society of the spectacle, the bankruptcy of peoples and nations, the expiry of all historical tasks, etc. See Prozorov (2009c, 2010) for the more detailed discussion of these themes. Various forms of eschatology inevitably make a comeback in the messianic discourse, since the ethos of dwelling in the 'as not' makes little sense insofar as the 'not' in question (the end of the existing state of affairs) is not held to be imminent.

⁶ This approach to the in-existent also characterizes the work of Jacques Rancière (1999), whose notion of the 'part of those who have no part' emphasizes the *structural* character of the 'non-part' condition, which permits the assumption by this particular group of the universal claim to embody the 'people' as such. There is nothing in the particularity of the excluded group that authorizes this ascent to universality, other than the fact of the exclusion from the positive world. A comparison of Rancière with Ernesto Laclau (2005) is instructive here. While for Laclau universality can only be an ultimately fake effect of the operation of hegemony that weaves together chains of equivalence around a master signifier, for Rancière universality is precisely what *escapes* these chains by virtue of its exclusion or self-exclusion from the hegemonic domain. Rancière's true universality is whatever does *not* fall under Laclau's fake universality.

⁷ The temptation of dogmatism is not easily avoided and Badiou himself succumbs to it on at least one occasion. In *Logics of Worlds* Badiou drops the notion of intervention that was so central to *Being and Event*, opting instead for a purely 'objective' registration of the event in the world. Combining the earlier notions of the evental site and the event into the new notion of the *site* as a self-belonging worldly object, Badiou is then able to define the event in strictly phenomenological terms as the maximally existent site, whose consequence is the maximal existence of the in-existent of the world (Badiou, 2009b: 361-374). The event thus no longer needs to be declared or 'named' by a subject but is phenomenologically accessible within the world. While in *Being and Event* the very belonging of the event to the situation was posited as undecidable, requiring the subjective intervention, whose 'correctness' could only be proved retroactively, there is apparently no need

for such 'decisionism' in the phenomenological framework of *Logics of Worlds*. While the event continues to be defined in terms of its consequences and can only be identified retroactively, the maximal existence of the site that defines the being of the event is accessible to every being within every world and thus no longer calls for an intervention. See Bosteels (2011b: 237-244) for a more general discussion of the abandonment of the notion of intervention in *Logics*. The key problem with this abandonment is precisely its implication of the objective accessibility of the event within the world, which exemplifies the dogmatist standpoint: if the event is objectively accessible, then *all* the beings of the world could immediately recognize it and assume fidelity to it. In other words, any being of the world could become a political subject simply by reading the event off the objective conditions of their world. Moreover, if the occurrence of the event could be objectively established within the world, it would be a worldly object and, as every worldly object, be subject to transcendental regulation, which would make it indistinguishable from a mere 'modification' (Badiou, 2009b: 391-395). In order to avoid these problems, our approach retains the notion of intervention as an undecidable decision that launches the subjective process in the world.